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RUCNNTA/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0069
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 0174

C O N F I D E N T I A L JEDDAH 000121

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/ARP, IO, DRL, IRF, GTIP

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/21/2014

TAGS: [PREL](#) [KISL](#) [OPDC](#) [OIC](#) [SA](#) [KTIP](#) [KIRF](#) [KWMN](#) [PHUM](#)

SUBJECT: OIC PONDERS CREATION OF NEW HUMAN RIGHTS ORGAN,
FINAL FORM UNCLEAR

Classified By: CG Martin R. Quinn for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: The Organization of the Islamic Conference(OIC) is in the process of establishing a new human rights organ, but it is far from certain whether member states will ratify the proposal during meetings in April and May and what form the new body will take. Several OIC declarations mandate the creation of a human rights organ, an issue personally supported by OIC Secretary General Ihsanoglu. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) PRESS STATEMENT ON ESTABLISHING HUMAN RIGHTS BODY: A February 18 newsletter from the OIC notes: "An informal advisory panel appointed by the Secretary General Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu held its first consultative meeting on February 15, 2009 at the OIC General Secretariat's headquarters in Jeddah. Establishment of an independent human rights body by the OIC Member States is considered to be one of the major steps in the transformation process of the OIC and as concrete evidence of the commitment of the Organization to promote and uphold the universal values of human rights."

¶3. (C) OIC OFFICIAL ON LIKELIHOOD OF SUCCESS: Ufuk Gokcen, a top advisor to the Secretary General commented to post about the road ahead for the creation of this new human rights body: "It is completely 50/50. There is a big possibility that it will pass, but with modifications. It will be very interesting to see the reaction of the member states." Gokcen was optimistic about the continuing debate: "Nobody can stop the process! It's in the charter, and it is an initiative of the Secretary General."

¶4. (SBU) THE MISSION OF THE NEW HUMAN RIGHTS ORGAN: Gokcen enumerated several charges for the new human rights body: supporting OIC positions with respect to human rights, enhancing international human rights, enhancing the role of human rights institutions and civil society, providing capacity building and institutional development, and advancing women's issues. The new institution will also pursue research on OIC priorities, serving in an advisory capacity to the Secretariat, while promoting information-sharing on human rights.

¶5. (U) OIC OBLIGATION TO CREATE A HUMAN RIGHTS BODY: The OIC has two binding agreements ratified by its member states to establish a human rights organ:

A) "Ten-Year Program of Action to Meet the Challenges Facing the Muslim Ummah in the 21st Century in Makkah" (December 2005 document). Section VIII, Human Rights and Good Governance, states:

"Call upon the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers to consider the possibility of establishing an independent

permanent body to promote human rights in the member states, in accordance with the provisions of the Cairo Declaration on Human Rights."

B) Revised charter of the OIC ratified March 2008). Article 15 states:

"The Independent Permanent Commission on Human Rights shall promote the civil, political, social and economic rights enshrined in the organization's covenants and declarations and in universally agreed human rights instruments, in conformity with Islamic value."

¶6. (C) COMMENT: The creation of an OIC human rights organ has the potential to become a tool to promote basic human rights among member states. However, given OIC's tendency to focus on anti-defamation and Islamophobia, it is also possible that the new body will not stray far from this agenda. Next steps include a meeting of an experts group from member states in April, which if consensus is reached (probably difficult and may require more than one meeting) will be followed by presentation for adoption at the OIC Foreign Ministers' meeting in Damascus in May. END COMMENT.

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